

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 02526 071719 Z

62

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15

USIA-12 AID-20 CU-04 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 SY-10

OPR-02 RSR-01 /165 W

----- 126359

R 071635 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1769

INFO USINT ALGIER

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USCINCEUR

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: ELAB, TS

SUBJECT: STUDENT CRISIS WORSENS

REF: TUNIS 2443; TUNIS 2479

1. SUMMARY. BUS STRIKE OVER BUT STUDENT STRIKE HAS
BECOME GENERAL AND UNLIMITED WITH STUDENTS PROTESTING
FAILURE ORGANIZE STUDENT CONGRESS AND RECENT DISCIPLINARY
ACTIONS. MAJOR STUDENT- POLICE CONFRONTATION MAY BE IN
OFFING. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HASTILY SUMMONED NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES FOR SPEECH MORNING MAY 7 IN WHICH
ACCORDING NEWS BRIEFS HE ALLUDED TO WORKER PROBLEM WITHOUT
MENTIONING STUDENT CRISIS. HE ATTACKED AHMED MESTIRI AND
INDICATED HE PROPOSES LAW TO REMOVE HIM FROM ASSEMBLY.
BOURGUIBA DEPARTS MAY 8 FOR LE KEF WHERE HE MAY MEET
BOUMEDIENNE (SEPTTEL) BEFORE RETURNING HERE MAY 15 FOR
MEETING WITH MCNAMARA OF IBRD. HOW STUDENT CRISIS
WILL EVOLVE DURING HIS ABSENCE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. GOT
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MAY CLOSE UNIVERSITY AND POSTPONE EXAMS. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE MOST IF NOT ALL BUS WORKERS HAVE APPARENTLY RETURNED TO WORK, SITUATION AT UNIVERSITY CONTINUES TO WORSEN AND MAJOR CONFRONTATION MAY BE IN OFFING. FACULTIES OF LAW, LETTERS AND SCIENCES (OVER 80 PERCENT OF UNIVERSITY OF TUNIS STUDENT BODY) HAVE DECLARED UNLIMITED GENERAL STRIKE FOLLOWING GENERAL ASSEMBLIES HELD MORNING 5 MAY. STUDENTS OF FACULTY OF MEDICINE REPORTEDLY MEETING TODAY TO DECIDE WHETHER JOIN THEM. MOTION REPORTEDLY ADOPTED BY STUDENTS AT 5 MAY MEETING REMINDS GOVERNMENT OF STUDENT' S CONSTANT DEMAND FOR HOLDING EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS OF TUNISIAN STUDENT UNION (UGET) AND RECENT DECISIONS BY COUNCIL OF DISCIPLINE WHICH WERE DESIGNED " TO ATTACK DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED STUDENTS". AS RESULT STUDENTS HAVE DECIDED UNDERTAKE GENERAL STRIKE THROUGHOUT UNIVERSITY, WITH CERTAIN NUMBER STUDENTS IN EACH FACULTY ENGAGING IN HUNGER STRIKE. (MOTION CLAIMS 30 NOW FASTING).

3. ACCORDING ONE PROFESSOR, STUDENTS HAVE BLOCKED ENTRY TO THE MAIN CAMPUS, WHICH HOUSES FACULTIES OF SCIENCE, LAW, AND SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING MORNING MAY 7 AND EVEN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT (USAID- SPONSORED) CLOSED FOR FIRST TIME BY THIS STUDENT ACTION.

4. POLICE PRESENTLY KEEPING THEIR DISTANCE FROM UNIVERSITY CAMPUS WITH THREE TRUCKS OF NATIONAL GUARD PARKED ABOUT 300 YARDS FROM CAMPUS ENTRY. RIOT POLICE (BPO) LOCATED STRATEGICALLY AT OTHER POINTS, INCLUDING 8 TRUCK LOADS NEAR EMBASSY AND USAID MISSION.

5. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HASTILY CONVOKED DEPUTIES OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO HIS CARTHAGE PALACE MORNING MAY 7 FOR ANOTHER LONG SPEECH-- HIS THIRD SPEECH TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN PAST MONTH. SPEECH WAS NOT BROADCAST DIRECT FOR FIRST TIME IN SOME TIME(WHICH IN ITSELF IS UNUSUAL), AND WE HAVE ONLY RADIO NES BRIEFS ON SPEECH' S CONTENT. FIRST REPORTS INDICATED THAT BOURGUIBA SPOKE ABOUT RECENT LABOR DISTURBANCES, BUT DID NOT COMMENT ON CURRENT STUDENT STRIKE. OUR PRELIMINARY INFORMATION INDICATES THAT HE SPOKE WITH SOME SYMPATHY OF LABOR GRIEVANCES, BUT ATTACKED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STRIKE AS EXTERNALLY DIRECTED.

6. BOURGUIBA ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD RESUME HIS VISITS TO GOVERNORATES, GOING TO LE KEF ON MAY 8. HE SAID HE WOULD RETURN MAY 15 TO MEET WITH IBRD PRESIDENT MCNAMARA. WHO SCHEDULED VISIT TUNIS MAY 14-16.

7. BALANCE OF SPEECH REPORTEDLY TAKEN UP WITH DIRECT ATTACK OF FORMER MINISTER OF INTERIOR AHMED MESTIRI, WHOM BOURGUIBA REFERRED TO AS " MICROBE". PRESIDENT STATED THAT PRIMIN NOUIRA (WHOM HE PRAISED EXTRAVAGEANTLY AGAIN DURING SPEECH) WOULD SHORTLY INTRODUCE BILL TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STATING THAT ANY DEPUTIES WHO HAD BEEN EXPELLED FROM PARTY (PSD) SHOULD LOSE THEIR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SEATS. THIS MEASURE WOULD BE DIRECTED PRIMARILY AGAINST MESTIRI, AND WOULD IN EFFECT REPEAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEASURE PASSED LAST YEAR THAT PERMITTED MESTIRI TO RETAIN HIS SEAT AFTER HIS EXPUSLION FROM PSD.

8. COMMENT: ATTACK ON MESTIRI ALMOST SURELY PROMPTED BY LATTER' S OPPOSITION IN ASSEMBLY TO BOURGUIBA' S PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES. WE WILL REPORT MORE EXTENSIVELY ON SPEECH WHEN TEXT AVAILABLE. PRELIMINARY IMPRESSION IS THAT INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IS DETERIORATING SHARPLY. GENERAL STRIKE AT UNIVERSITY ON TOP OF RECENT LABOR DISTURBANCES (WITH FOR FIRST TIME SOME CONNECTION BETWEEN THEM) OBVIOUSLY RAISES SOME SERIOUS NEW PROBLEMS FOR GOVERNMENT. GOT MAY CLOSE UNIVERSITY ONCE AGAIN, AS IT DID LAST YEAR, BUT STUDENT GRIEVANCES WILL REMAIN UNSOLVED, AND NEW SYMPATHY FOR STUDENT POSITION MAY BECOME EVIDENT. BOURGIBA' S CONTINUING ATTACKS ON OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADERS ARE UNLIKELY TO HELP CALM SITUATION DOWN. SEELYE

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*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: willialc
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
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Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: n/a
Errors: n/a
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
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30 JUN 2005

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Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
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Subject: STUDENT CRISIS WORSENS
TAGS: ELAB, TS
To: AF
ALGIERS
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SECSTATE WASHDC
TRIPOLI
USCINCEUR
Type: TE

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